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STATE FOR NEA/MAG AND DRL/NESCA

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [MO](#)

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS DIALOGUE, WESTERN SAHARA, AND
INTERNAL POLITICS

Classified By: DCM Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In the second annual session of the U.S.-Morocco bilateral human rights dialogue, our senior GOM interlocutor used the occasion to criticize the existence of separate human rights reports for Morocco and Western Sahara. The Moroccans also complained that the USG distorted the government's human rights record in the Sahara, "which is the same" as anywhere else in the Kingdom, they claimed. The Moroccans told us the Government was working on a revised press code and held open the possibility that jail terms might be eliminated from the range of penalties for violators. Our GOM hosts also denied that there were "red lines" limiting freedom of expression, asserting that Morocco only draws the line on threats to public order. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On January 30, then Charge and PolOffs represented the Embassy at our second annual bilateral human rights dialogue meeting, hosted by MOI Director General Mohyieddine Amzazi and joined by representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Justice. The four-hour dialogue, initiated by the Government as a means of providing the Embassy information during the preparation of the human rights report was delayed for months due to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, reorganization that accompanied the formation of the El-Fassi government.

¶3. (C) DG Amzazi expressed indignation over the USG practice of producing separate Human Rights Reports for Morocco and Western Sahara reports, noting that the International Religious Freedom Report on Western Sahara is, by contrast, an addendum to the Morocco report. Commenting on the problems the report identified in the Western Sahara, Amzazi was adamant that the same human rights standards are applied in Laayoune as in Tangiers, an assertion we hotly disputed.

¶4. (C) Amzazi asserted that a new press code is being hammered out "on the basis of broad consensus" between government and journalists. He emphasized that no journalists were imprisoned in 2007 and described jail terms as an "unenforced" aspect of the press code law. He allowed that the government might eliminate criminal penalties as long as (onerous) civil arrangements are in place to regulate journalists. (NOTE: We understand that positive elements in last year's draft that might have been acceptable to the media community were removed or replaced at MOI behest. With no consensus, the bill is now in limbo. END NOTE.)

15. (C) On freedom of expression, MOJ Office Director Abdenebbaoui maintained there are no "red lines" but rather inviolable "principles" that govern Moroccan society. Amzazi insisted the GOM is getting tougher on corruption with an ever increasing stream of high profile prosecutions. We noted continuing credible reports of harassment, arbitrary arrest and beatings of persons suspected of separatist sympathies in Sahara. We provided the names of four repeat human rights offenders and recent written complaints from local citizens, which they promised to investigate. They maintained the GOM line that freedom of expression was allowed until it crossed the line into threats to public order. (COMMENT: Subsequent negative response from the MOJ on repeat offenders has not been convincing. END COMMENT.)

16. (C) In a subsequent lunch, Amzazi slammed the Polisario's "bellicose" threats to return to war, saying they called into question the point of the Manhasset process. He complained that the USG spurns the Royal Consultative Commission on Sahrawi Affairs (CORCAS), "the originator of the whole autonomy initiative," and vowed that the GOM would never grant NGO status to CODESA, an apparently pro-Polisario human rights NGO, because of its rejection of Moroccan sovereignty. No group with a goal contrary to Moroccan territorial integrity could legally be allowed to register, he said, unless the group modifies its charter.

17. (C) When the conversation turned to domestic politics, Amzazi offered his personal opinion that a healthy, if messy, process of realignment and consolidation of the Moroccan body politic was underway. All the major parties are cleaning house and reorganizing themselves. He said (his former boss) Fouad Ali El-Himma's new Movement of All Democrats offered promise to build a new national political consensus around a progressive development agenda.

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